R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 019 153 RC 000 406

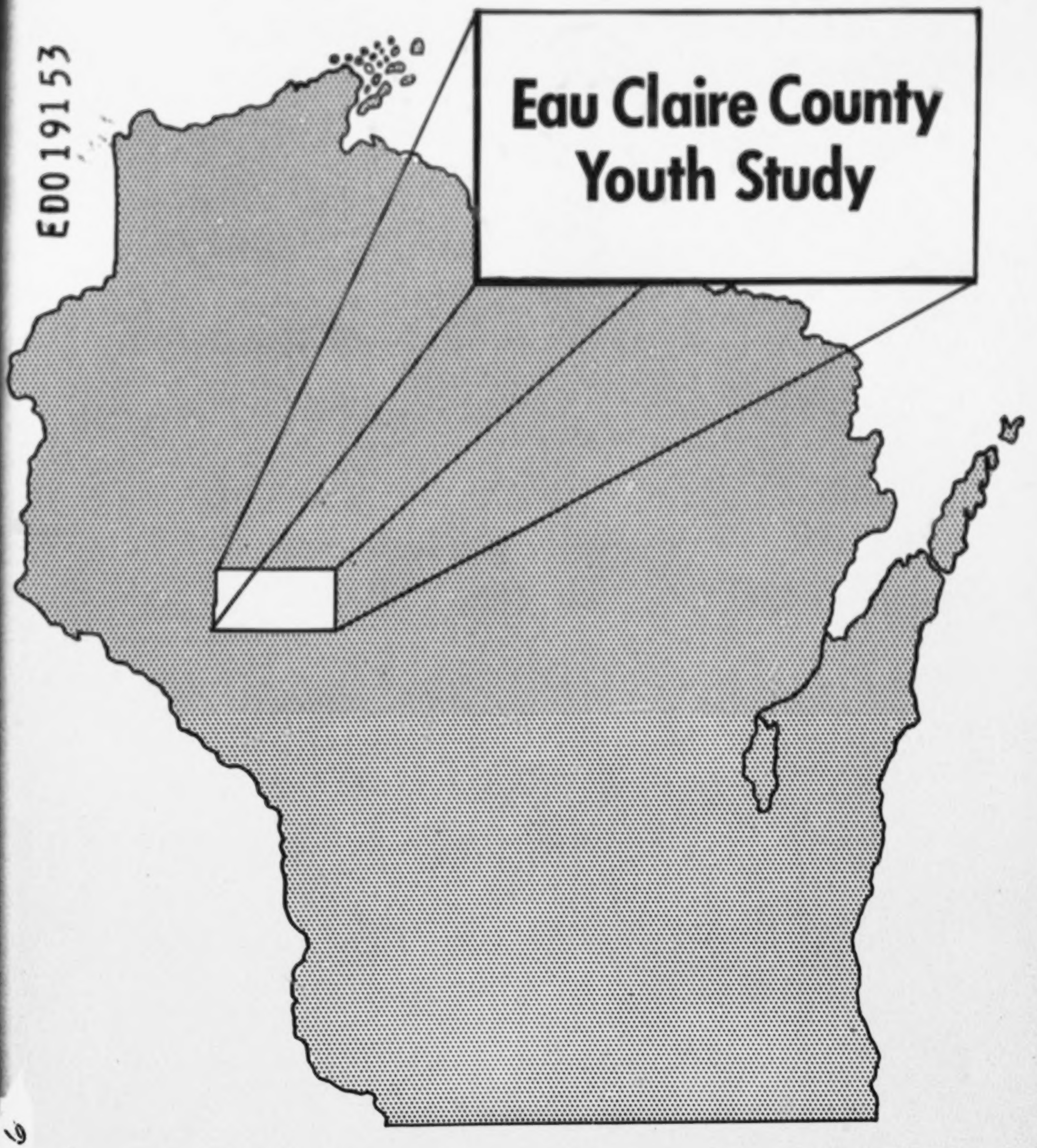
EAU CLAIRE COUNTY YOUTH STUDY, 1966.
BY- THURSTON, JOHN R. AND OTHERS
WISCONSIN STATE DEPT. OF PUBLIC WELFARE, MADISON
REPORT NUMBER 2611-MH-00672-03 PUB DATE 66
EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.68 139P.

DESCRIPTORS- *AGGRESSION, BEHAVIOR RATING SCALES, *CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT, DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS, DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, FAMILY ENVIRONMENT, DELINQUENCY, *DELINQUENT IDENTIFICATION, *DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR, FAMILY INFLUENCE, MEASUREMENT, MISBEHAVIOR, PROBLEM CHILDREN, RURAL DROPOUTS, RURAL ENVIRONMENT, SELF CONCEPT, SOCIAL PROBLEMS, *SOCIALLY DEVIANT BEHAVIOR, STUDENT BEHAVIOR, STUDENT TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS, *GLUECK DELINQUENCY PROMENESS SCALE, SENTENCE COMPLETION FORM,

A TOTAL OF 384 CHILDREN WERE IDENTIFIED BY THEIR TEACHERS AS DEMONSTRATING EITHER (1) PERSISTENT APPROVED OR (2) PERSISTENT DISAPPROVED CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR. AN EXAMINER INTERVIEWED EACH FAMILY USING THE GLUECK RATING SCALE AND ADMINISTERED SEVERAL PSYCHOLOGICAL INSTRUMENTS TO EACH CHILD (GLUECK DELINQUENCY PROMENESS SCALE, THE SENTENCE COMPLETION FORM, AND THE SITUATION EXERCISES). SEVERAL STRONG RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR AND VARIOUS FACETS OF THE CHILD'S FAMILY LIFE BECAME EVIDENT. THE TWO GROUPS DIFFERED MARKEDLY IN THE MANIFESTATION OF PATERNAL DISCIPLINE, FAMILY GROUP ACTIVITY, MATERNAL SUPERVISION, AND PARENTAL DISAPPROVAL AS RELATED TO CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR. HELP FOR THOSE STUDENTS WHOSE BEHAVIORS INDICATE AGGRESSIVE TENDENCIES SHOULD BEGIN IN THE EARLY GRADES BEFORE SELF-CONCEPTS BECOME STABILIZED AND SHOULD TAKE THE FORM OF ALLEVIATION OF AGGRESSION-INDUCING FRUSTRATIONS AT HOME AND WITHIN THE CLASSROOM. THE TEACHER MUST TAKE THE INITIATIVE IN ISOLATING AND IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS AND IN ATTEMPTING TO SECURE REMEDIAL ASSISTANCE. (DA)

ED019153

Eau Claire County Youth Study



A Report to the Wisconsin State Board of Public Welfare

1966

RC 000 406

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

John R. Thurston, Ph.D., Project Director
Wisconsin State University-Eau Claire

James J. Benning, Ed.D., Co-Director
Wisconsin State University-Eau Claire

John F. Feldhusen, Ph.D., Consultant
Purdue University

Sponsored by Wisconsin State Department of Public Welfare

Supported by Public Health Service Research Grant
2R11 MH 00672-05 from the National Institute of Mental Health

Acknowledgement

No report of the research endeavor known as the Eau Claire County Youth Study would be complete without acknowledging the cooperation received from so many people and institutions within Eau Claire County. The research staff feels that particular mention should be made of the many members of the Advisory Committee who provided encouragement and prestige from the very outset. Recognition should go to them for whatever success has been attained in making this a community based venture. The following are the members of the Advisory Committee:

John A. Bacharach

Lawrence L. Bennett, Jr.

John Bowman

Mrs. Frances G. Coffman

Homer E. DeLong

Mrs. Walter Gold

Hon. Connor T. Hansen

Gail D. Hansis

Mrs. Harold Kaeding

Paul H. Kusuda

James F. Lewis, Ph. D.

Harold L. MacLaughlin

Mrs. Olga Martin

James A. Riley

Father John D. Rossiter

Rev. Roy B. Schmeichel

Lloyd H. Thompson

Jennie L. Webster

Douglas G. Weiford

Wallace C. Westlund

Lester E. Wogahn

Abstract

The focus of this research was 384 children who were identified by their teachers as consistently demonstrating either socially approved or disapproved (aggressive) classroom behavior. These youngsters and their parents were evaluated by specially trained interviewers. Substantial psychosocial and sociological differences were found between the "approved" and "disapproved" children. In particular, the father's discipline, mother's supervision, and parental attitudes were related to the behavior of the child in the classroom.

The role of various elements of the community in meeting the challenge posed by the aggressive child is discussed in light of research findings.

Persistent classroom misbehavior constitutes a serious problem for the student, for his classmates, for his teacher and ultimately for the community as a whole. Chronic misconduct appears to be essentially aggressive in character since it involves defiance, destructiveness, rule breaking, class disruption, cruelty, and fighting. Efficient learning in the classroom becomes virtually impossible when the teacher and students are frequently diverted from the learning task by aggressively troublesome students.

Beyond his immediate impact, the aggressive child may exert more lasting harmful effects upon the climate of the classroom. Other children may imitate his misbehavior. The teacher may become increasingly watchful and decreasingly instructive. Prolonged contact with problems of this nature may also engender emotional disturbances in the teacher. In a very real sense, everyone in the classroom is influenced to some degree by the aggressive child.

But in addition and beyond the confines of the school, since classroom aggression appears to be related to the problem of school dropout and juvenile delinquency, society at large also becomes a victim. Thus, because of the wide range of influence of persistent classroom misbehavior, it surely seems a subject worthy of considerable interest and study if it is to be understood and alleviated.

While there have been many speculative articles on the subject of classroom misbehavior, and well-intentioned advice abounds regarding it,

there is little empirical research reported. Substantive research is needed to provide insight into this perplexing classroom problem.

The Eau Claire County Youth Study

The major interest of this research project was children who were identified by their teachers as consistently manifesting either socially approved or disapproved behavior in the classroom. Each of the third, sixth, and ninth grade teachers in the public and parochial schools in Eau Claire County, Wisconsin, was asked to nominate from his class the two boys and the two girls who displayed the most socially approved behavior and the two boys and the two girls who displayed the most socially disapproved behavior. A behavior problems check list was developed and each teacher was asked to check the characteristics which were found consistently or frequently in each nominee. The check list of negative behavior characteristics was: quarrelsome, sullen, rude, defiant, resentful, steals, lies, destructive, disrupts class, is a bully, has temper tantrums, overly dominant, talks back, cruel, tardy or absent without excuse, profanity or obscenity, fights with other pupils, and deceptive. Approved behavior was defined for the teacher in such terms as industrious, productive, good-natured, ambitious, cooperative, and truthful.

Nominations were received from 259 teachers. One hundred ninety-two disapproved youngsters were drawn randomly from a pool of 568 nominations, with the additional specification that there be at least two

characteristics checked on the behavior problems check list. Another 192 children were drawn randomly from a pool of 982 nominations of approved boys and girls. The sample was drawn to assure equal numbers by sex, grade, and location, urban or rural.

A trained interviewer-examiner was assigned to conduct the complete interviewing and testing of each selected child and his family. The interviewer met with the father, mother, and child individually to secure responses to structured interview instruments. On the basis of his contacts with the family, the interviewer evaluated the family according to the Glueck rating scales (Glueck, 1950). The interviewer also administered three psychological instruments to each child: the Kvaraceus Delinquency Proneness Scale, the Sentence Completion Form, and the *Situation Exercises*.

Results

Strong relationships between classroom behavior and various facets of the child's family life were revealed. Furthermore, the two groups differed significantly in their responses to several types of psychological tests. The intensive evaluation of the personal backgrounds and activities of these approved and disapproved children suggests that it might be appropriate to refer to the two groups as "advantaged" and "disadvantaged" children.

As contrasted to the approved or "advantaged" child, the child who was displaying socially disapproved classroom behavior is found to be growing up with the following familial "disadvantages:"

1. The discipline by the father is either lax, overly strict, or erratic.
2. The supervision by the mother is unsuitable or only fair.
3. The parents are indifferent or even hostile toward the child. Their influence seems to take the form of much "don't" or "don't care" but very little "do."
4. The family acts only somewhat or not at all as a unit.
5. The parents generally do not talk things over regarding the child.
6. The parents do not have a close and equal partnership in their marriage.
7. The parents disapprove of many things in their child.
8. The parents have difficulty in controlling their tempers and often resort to angry physical, punishment.
9. The parents depreciate their influence on the development of their child, assigning responsibility for his actions to others.
10. Many of the parents report no church membership. Even if members of a church, their attendance tends to be sporadic.
11. The parents tend to have less education and are engaged in lower level occupations.

As compared to the approved or "advantaged" child, the child who was displaying socially disapproved classroom behavior tends to manifest the following characteristics:

1. The child is disruptive and aggressive in the classroom.
2. The child is apt to have low or only average intelligence.
3. The achievement of the child in arithmetic and reading is low, even lower than might be expected on the basis of his intelligence.
4. The child is likely to have a low opinion of adults, including teachers, and is sometimes harsh in his evaluation of them.
5. The child, particularly if a girl, rejects the parents as models for behavior.
6. The child is oriented away from the classroom and he thinks more of himself in terms of the world outside the school.

The results from the three psychological tests are consistent with the other findings. The children who were displaying socially disapproved classroom behavior gave more responses on the Kvaraceus Delinquency Proneness Scale (Kvaraceus, 1950) which revealed negative or self-defeating attitudes than the approved children. The difference between groups was greatest at the ninth grade level and smallest at the third grade level. Scores on the KD scale were also subdivided into five diagnostic categories. The disapproved children were found to have less favorable attitudes toward school, fellow students, occupational planning, adult control, and problems of misconduct than the approved children. The results of the Sentence Completion Form

showed that the disapproved children gave more responses reflecting socially undesirable ways of reacting than did the approved children. Finally, the Situation Exercises (four story reaction tests which described a child in a frustrating situation and called for ideas as to what the child would do) revealed that disapproved urban children as a group gave more socially maladaptive responses than approved urban children to frustration situations involving accusations of cheating and punishment for an unavoidable mistake. Differences between approved and disapproved rural children were not significant. On the Situation Exercises the disapproved children scored significantly lower than approved children in the defendance need. That is, they would give fewer responses indicating a need to explain, interpret, rationalize, or justify their misbehavior.

As is true for all psychological information showing group differences, it should be pointed out that no disapproved child or his family would be described in all of the aforementioned terms nor is it likely that many approved children would be completely free from these disadvantages. The pattern of background factors and personal characteristics is undoubtedly unique for each child, approved or disapproved. But when these disadvantages are present, the child possessing them is likely to encounter difficulty in the classroom.

Discussion

It is acknowledged that virtually all children show some socially disapproved behavior at least occasionally, in the normal process of growing up. But misbehaviors of this order should not be confused with persistently aggressive and disruptive behavior which takes the form of cruelty to other children, destruction of school property, and defiance of the teacher. Clearly stubborn, hard-core disruptive and aggressive behavior characterizes only some children while occasional and less serious misbehaviors are characteristic of most children. This research was concerned with stubbornly severe misbehavior and its opposite, persistent socially approved behavior.

It was beyond the scope of this study to do more than speculate about the causes of the "disadvantages" associated with classroom aggression. This would seem to be a most appropriate area for further intensive research. It seems reasonable, however, to assume that the family reflects the personalities, attitudes, ideals, aspirations, and happiness of its individual members. Speaking generally, it would seem that uncertainty and indecision are characteristics of the parents of the disapproved children. They tend to depreciate their influence on the development of their child. They are inclined to assign responsibility for his actions to others. Those who indicate church attendance do not always attend as regularly as might be expected. The influence of these parents seems to take the form of much negative but very little positive direction.

The relationship of parental education and occupation to the child's classroom behavior is substantial. Aggressive children are likely to have parents who have less education and who are in comparatively lower level occupations than the parents of approved children. The lower occupational status may mean that the family is financially insecure with a dismal economic future. Financial strains could exaggerate existing familial and personality problems within the home and hence directly influence the home atmosphere in an unhappy fashion. On the basis of this study's findings, the conditions of living in the rural areas would seem to be particularly conducive to the development of these "disadvantages" involving education and finances.

The early misbehaviors of the classroom aggressor may also be reactions based partly upon the similarity of the classroom and home in terms of both being sources of frustration and failure. The early misbehaviors may produce further difficulties for the child in his relationships with the teacher and with other children which in turn make the classroom per se a more and more likely source of frustration for the child. A form of vicious, downward spiraling of effective adjustment may thus emerge. In time the child may become identified increasingly with other disapproved youngsters and decreasingly with students who conduct themselves in an approved manner. He may come to regard himself as unruly, disruptive, and defiant. He may seek out the company of those other students who have a similar view of self. Over its period

of development, this reactional pattern becomes more and more a part of the stable behavior pattern of the disapproved child. The results of the psychological tests support this view that the reactional pattern crystallizes as the child moves from third, to sixth, and to ninth grade.

For the approved or advantaged child, a similar process is occurring, although in the opposite direction. He is less likely to have much in the form of frustration within his home. He comes to school better prepared to meet its challenges. He profits from his academic experiences and gains some satisfaction on this basis. His emerging self-concept is described in the terms of approved behavior such as industrious, good-natured, ambitious, truthful, and cooperative. He looks at himself in terms of these favorable adjectives. He is less likely to engage in behavior which is contrary to this developing self-image, for to do so might result in his having to relinquish favor and prestige. He seeks out other individuals who conduct themselves as he does. All of these forces and experiences tend to impel the approved children into common experiences with one another.

Help for the child whose behavior is becoming persistently aggressive probably should begin in the early grades before self-concepts and personality patterns become stabilized. Responsibility for the remedial effort would probably have to be taken by the school working in conjunction with the community's social welfare agencies and psychological clinics.

Remedial efforts should probably take the form of help to alleviate aggression-inducing frustration both within the home and the classroom.

Extended social work contact with the parents will probably be necessary in alleviating the relevant difficulties within the home. Clergymen could make a substantial contribution in this regard. In the school attempts might be made to offset the classroom engendered aggressions by helping the child to experience success and satisfaction in a remedial education program designed to fit his special needs. Such a program would need to provide new learning experiences at achievement levels at which the child could experience abundant success and satisfaction.

Teachers should also take every opportunity to learn about these aggressive children and their parents. In most cases very little will be done to help these children if their teachers do not take the initiative in studying their problems and in trying to secure or provide remedial assistance for them. In-service meetings and special university classes can provide some of the knowledge which the teacher needs in order to meet these problems effectively. Psychological and social work consultants can also provide much assistance to the teachers. Through the consultants other community agencies can become actively involved as part of a comprehensive "help" program for these children.

Classroom aggression in and of itself is serious enough to justify much more research. But, if as has been suggested, a relationship exists between classroom aggression, school dropout, and juvenile delinquency, the importance of and urgency for additional research in this area is increased enormously.

References

1. Feldhusen, J. F., Thurston, J. R., and Benning, J. J. Delinquency Proneness and Classroom Behavior. Madison, Wisconsin: State Department of Public Welfare, 1965, 236 pages.

2. Glueck, S. and Glueck, Eleanor Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency. New York: Commonwealth Fund, 1950.

3. Kvaraceus, W. C. The KD Proneness Scale and Check List. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1950.

4. Thurston, J. R., Feldhusen, J. F., and Benning, J. J. Classroom Behavior: Background Factors and Psycho-Social Correlates. Madison, Wisconsin: State Department of Public Welfare, 1964, 471 pages.